

I have many unanswered questions about this story. It starts out with God appearing to Abraham. Then we get three strangers who are treated like royalty by Abraham, far above and beyond the required amount of hospitality that was customary in the ancient Near East. Are these three strangers meant to be the Trinity? Or are they prophets of God? Or maybe they are angels? We may never know who they are for sure who these three characters are that show up suddenly, out of the blue. Another question I have is: why hasn't Abraham told his wife about the covenant God made with him yet? I mean, she is a key player in the promised descendants, right? So, why is she just finding out from three strangers that God has promised her children? No wonder she is surprised and laughs. I'd also be a little miffed with Abraham if I were Sarah. I find out from three strangers, Abe?! All in all, this story is full of unexpected surprises. This Scripture teaches us that God has a tendency of showing up in our lives when we least expect it and then suddenly changes our lives forever.

Abraham is unexpectedly surprised by these three strangers, possible the physical manifestation of God. Sarah's life is changed forever because of the visit of these three strangers in the middle of the day. She learns that she is about to become a mother, not just of a child, but the mother of an entire nation of people whose numbers will outnumber the stars in heaven. As Revs. Eric Fistler and Rob McCoy put it on the website, Pulpit Fiction, what is behind Sarah's laughter at the promised child is years and years of deep disappointment and frustration and resignation. She had hoped for a child in the prime of her life. Now she's an old woman and God is finally giving her what she has long desired and so she laughs. I cannot blame her for laughing. God has a way of showing up when we least expect it and changing our lives forever.

I don't know about you, but I know what it's like for God to show up when I least expect it. I've sure that I have shared the story of my long call process before today. I heard the calling of God at a young age. I worked hard to become a minister. I thought I was doing everything right and still God's promise wasn't coming to fruition. There was a time in my life in my mid-twenties when I was bitter and frustrated and jaded by the Church ordination process. I had a difficult internship. I had a been told not yet by my CPM. I was tired and I was bitter and angry. What I haven't told you is how I finally got ordained. On a whim, I applied for a program designed for people looking for first calls and churches looking for pastors in underserved areas. You've got to realize that I didn't even send in my application until the last minute. Like, it was the last day applications were due. Oh, and it was Easter weekend when I asked my pastor for her recommendation. If you're watching Reve Lonna Lee, I'm so sorry for doing that to you on Easter Sunday. I thought I wasn't going to be accepted this year and that it would be another year of waiting. However, I got accepted to the program and I was matched with a church and I was finally ordained...four years later than I had originally planned. It took years of hard work. I went through years of disappointment and frustration. I'm not equating my relatively short journey with the long, drawn out journey of Sarah. Nor am I saying that my ordination call is the same thing as having a child. What I am saying is that God can show up and fulfill promises when we least expect it. Had I not read an article about the program that week, who knows what would have happened. Had I said, there's no way I can do this, I might not be here with you all today. And the truth is, there is no way I could have done all this by myself. With God, all things all possible. God can call someone like me and make things happen. And God can give Sarah a child when she was least expecting it. We serve a God of possibility and grace.

Before I finish my sermon, I want to say that, while it is true that we serve a God of possibility and grace, there are many people who have prayed hard and long for things to happen that never come to fruition. And I want you to know that that is not because you didn't pray hard enough or because God doesn't care about you. I wish I can tell you why Sarah gets a child in old age and another person is told they will never have children. I wish I could tell you why my dream came to fruition while others worked hard for their dreams only to never see it to fruition. I want you to know that I see you. Your pain and frustration are heard and acknowledged. I will sit with you. I will pray with you. I will cry with you. And I will continue to work with you in our common struggles and hardships. We continue to fight and struggle and yearn for those things that have not yet come to be. We work hard for the day when people will weep no more and all people will be welcomed at the Welcome Table. I know that we serve a God of unexpected surprises. And so I continue. Amen.

